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SCHOOLS--AND DIGNITY--FOR ALL.

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AMERICAN EDUCATION MUST RECOGNIZE AND ESTEEM THE TWO-THIRDS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL POPULATION WHO ARE NOT COLLEGE BOUND. SOCIETY NEEDS AND WILL CONTINUE TO NEED SKILLED, UNSKILLED, AND SEMISKILLED CRAFTSMEN AND WORKERS. TO TRAIN THE NONACADEMIC STUDENTS FOR WORK AND TO EMPHASIZE THE DIGNITY OF LABOR, SCHOOLS SHOULD PROVIDE A VARIETY OF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES TO A STRICTLY ACADEMIC CURRICULUM. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "PHI DELTA KAPPAN," VOLUME 47, NUMBER 9, MAY 1966. (NH)

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Schools—and Dignity—for *All*

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By GEORGE MEANY

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RECENT years have been marked by a great national, state, and local effort to improve the educational opportunities for American young people. Yet we are still a long way from achieving the goal of true equality of opportunity in education.

There are in fact many kinds of inequality which persist in American education. There is the inequality which results from geographical accident. There are wealthy states and communities and there are poor ones. More than twice as much money is spent educating a child in some states as in others. Recent federal aid programs have helped this situation, but they have not fundamentally changed it.

Similar inequalities exist within states, with children in the wealthy suburban schools receiving quality education while children in the inner city schools make do with crowded classes in out-of-date school rooms supported by inadequate budgets.

And, both in the North and South, there remain educational inequalities which are a shameful heritage of racial segregation.

One of the most serious educational inequalities of all, however, is one which can exist within the confines of a single school. It is the inequality which results from a growing preoccupation in the schools with the college-bound student and consequent inattention to the needs of the student who does not plan on following high school with college.

For the academically oriented student, most schools have developed an impressive set of machinery to move him along to the maximum of his ability. There are countless tests to measure his intelligence, his achievements, his potential, his career interests, and his social adjustment. There are honors courses to introduce him to the most advanced new concepts in science and mathematics. There are guidance counselors to make certain that he finds the right scholarship to the right college to prepare him for the right graduate school. The college-bound student is the center of attention in most American schools.

Now it is quite proper that the schools should concern themselves with the needs of the academically oriented student. More of our young people enter college today than have ever done so before. No other nation has ever approached us in the proportion of young people going on to higher education. The fact that more than a third of our young people enter college is a considerable achievement and it is a national asset which will pay rich dividends in the future.

And yet we must not become so exalted that we forget that two-thirds of our young people do not go on to college. Under the best of circumstances, there will continue to be millions of young people who won't go to college, who don't want to go to college, and who should not have to go to college to establish a place for themselves in society. Among them will be some of our ablest high school graduates. Our schools are not doing their job if they concentrate all of their major efforts on the one-third who are headed for college and give short shift to the two-thirds who are not.

Most guidance counselors can provide a student with precise and detailed information as to the courses, grades, and test scores which he will need if he is to be seriously considered for admission to Harvard. But it is the sorry fact that very few guidance counselors have even a remote idea of what high school preparation would be desirable for an apprentice electrician.

Much has been said and written about the greater educational demands which will be placed upon the work force of the future, and these things are undeniably true. It is nevertheless the fact that the skilled crafts are at the very heart of American production and they will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. And with few exceptions, the skilled crafts will not be made up of college graduates. They will be made up, rather, of young people who have had a quality high

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school education designed to meet their needs. In most cases it will be supplemented with apprenticeship training or post-high school vocational and technical training.

There will also be a continuing need for unskilled and semi-skilled workers in production and in the service industries. These workers too, if they are to be more than drudges, need the best that the schools can give them. They need an educational background that will enable them to advance through on-the-job training. And they need subjects such as history, social studies, and literature which can give them a sense of their own worth and which will help them fulfill their role as citizens in the world of the twentieth century—and soon the twenty-first century.

Fortunately, people are not all alike, and whatever their differences, they are valuable to our society. There are many ways in which young people can develop their abilities to the fullest. Going to college is one way, but it is not the only way. America needs doctors and physicists, America needs machinists and printers, and America needs hospital orderlies and teachers' aides. We need to be concerned with making higher education attainable for every young person who wants it. But there will never be a time when every young person will go to the university, even if higher education were tuition-free and there were ample financial assistance for all students who need it. Many young people will find their challenge in less academic endeavors. We need these young people and we need a system of education which provides them with maximum opportunity for self-development.

The high school dropout has become a subject of national attention, and properly so. But if we want to reduce the rate of dropouts, we need to look at the schools as well as at the dropouts. Students drop out of school when the school does not make contact with their own needs, when the school is preoccupied with the needs of other kinds of students. In many of our largest cities it is difficult to make a convincing argument to persuade a potential dropout to remain in school. It will be difficult until the school can present new evidence that it is prepared to deal realistically with his problems.

Most important of all, school officials must widen their sense of human values. They must recapture the sense of the dignity of labor, a concept which has been all but lost in most schools. Educators speak of "gifted" children, but they forget that children may have many kinds of gifts. An unusually high I.Q. score is one kind of gift, but an aptitude for craftsmanship is also a gift, one for which our society should be grateful and which it should both cultivate and honor.

But in most schools a student is honored only if he is academically oriented. The "honors" classes are reserved for the future research physicists and theoretical mathematicians. If there is a school anywhere that has instituted an honors program for future apprentices, it has certainly escaped public notice. And yet, the future skilled craftsmen of America have every right to an honors program of their own, taught by the best teachers the school system can assemble, organized in small classes to provide maximum individual growth.

Work itself is dignified. To dig a ditch or lay a railroad track was a dignified thing to do even though the job required very little in the way of skill or training. Today many of the unskilled jobs of yesterday have vanished. Few of our high school students today have ever seen a ditch digger or a hod carrier. But today there are new unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, many of them in the service trades. These workers too can find dignity in the quality of their education and in the assurance of wages and working conditions that do not degrade them. We need, in fact, to assert as a primary goal of education the dignity of each individual whatever his role in society.

Our schools must have a variety of concerns to match the variety of young people who attend them. Every student, whatever his life goal, must find in school that which challenges the best that he has within him. He has a right to teachers who respect the integrity of his goals. He has a right to classes that bring quality education to bear upon his needs. He has a right to counselors who can guide him to the education in high school and beyond high school which he needs. Colleges and universities are, of course, one kind of education which can follow high school graduation. But for the nonacademically oriented young person we need a wide range of other alternatives—junior colleges, technical institutes, post-graduate courses in the high schools, apprenticeship programs, and continuing adult education through both the public schools and the university extension programs.

When every student is offered the best that the school system has to offer, then and only then will we be able to say that we have achieved true equality of educational opportunity.

► Grants totaling $1,063,497 to expand facilities of educational television were approved in February by John W. Gardner, HEW secretary.